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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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SUBJECT Shevchenko/Gorbachev

SUSAN STAMBERG: A prominent Soviet defector predicted today that the selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as the new Communist Party leader will not change Soviet arms control policies. Arkady Shevchenko, a high-ranking Soviet diplomat for 22 years, broke with Moscow seven years ago and now lives in the United States. He testified today before a defense policy panel in the House of Representatives.

NPR's David Molpus reports.

DAVID MOLPUS: Shevchenko described Gorbachev as dynamic, charismatic, even charming, and very intelligent, a man who should project a far more favorable public image than his immediate predecessors, a man not to be underestimated. But the former Soviet official said Gorbachev is by no means all-powerful. Some Politburo members, he said, have more power in certain areas, especially Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.

Shevchenko, who used to be an arms control adviser to the Foreign Minister, says Gromyko will dominate Soviet foreign policy and arms control policy.

ARKADY SHEVCHENKO: Gorbachev most likely concentrate, at this moment, all his efforts in consolidating his power within the party apparatus, in his putting his persons in the Central Committee, in the key position of the Central Committee of the Party. I can hardly see that Gorbachev even will devote too much attention to the forthcoming negotiations on arms control, because he has to deal with so many problems in the Soviet Union. And he trusts Gromyko. And it is Gromyko who become now unusually strong force in the Soviet Union.

MOLPUS: Shevchenko said the military no longer has a strong voice in the Kremlin. Marshal Sergei Sokolov, the Soviet Defense Minister, is a very ordinary man, he said, more of a yes-man than any of the top defense leaders of the past two decades. This too, he said, enhances Gromyko's power.

Most of the questions from the Congressmen on the panel concerned how the U.S. can get the best results from the Geneva arms control talks. Shevchenko said the U.S. should not push too hard to impose its will in the talks. That tactic, he said, would result in stalemate, and likely push the Soviets toward a fortress mentality at home and abroad.

At the same time, he said, Congress shouldn't undercut U.S. negotiators by cancelling weapons like the MX missile.

SHEVCHENKO: If we make unilateral concessions, then the Kremlin will simply escalate its demands. It is not a Soviet mentality to think in a way that the more concession you do to them, the more conciliatory they become.

MOLPUS: But Shevchenko would not go as far as President Reagan, who has said Congressional approval of MX is an essential